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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0720
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0147
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU PRIORITY 0324
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 2944
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHMFIA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 003265

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/2016
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#) [BH](#) [NP](#)
SUBJECT: NEPAL: FOOD FOR BHUTANESE REFUGEES AT RISK, GON
NEEDS TO TREAD SOFTLY ON TIBETANS

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Classified By: CDA Nicholas Dean for reasons 1.4(b/d).

Summary

[11.](#) (U) This is an action request. Please see para 8.

[12.](#) (C) Foreign Ministry Joint Secretary Dinesh Bhattarai expressed concern to RefCoord December 21 about a possible break in the World Food Program's food supply to the Bhutanese refugees. WFP Deputy Country Director separately requested the USG consider funding the refugee food program. Bhattarai noted widespread concern about the planned U.S. resettlement program and requested additional details. He was optimistic that third-country resettlement could begin after the next Bhutan-Nepal ministerial, but stressed the need to hold the Royal Government of Bhutan in some way accountable for the expulsion of nearly 1/6 of its population. On the issue of 180 Tibetan asylee following-to-join cases, Bhattarai indicated that the Government of Nepal (GON) would have to proceed very quietly and that the U.S. would need to constantly remind the GON of its humanitarian obligation to allow these families to be reunified.

Possible Break In The Food Pipeline For Bhutanese Refugees

[13.](#) (SBU) In a December 21 meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Joint Secretary for UN Affairs Dinesh Bhattarai, RefCoord learned that the World Food Program (WFP) office in Kathmandu had issued a letter to the MFA suggesting that, beginning January 30, 2007, there would be a break in the food pipeline for the 107,000 Bhutanese refugees living in eastern Nepal. Bhattarai expressed serious concern about the humanitarian crisis that would ensue if food assistance

were cut.

Food Delivery Ensured Through January

¶4. (SBU) RefCoord subsequently spoke with WFP Deputy Country Director Dominique Hyde regarding this issue. Hyde reported that every two years WFP had to seek funding from donor countries for food assistance to the Bhutanese refugees. Current funding was sufficient only through December 31, 2006, she said. Although WFP had borrowed funding through an internal loan process, that would only ensure food delivery to the refugee camps through end-January 2007. Hyde indicated that the European Union was the only donor that had shown interest in funding this program and even that commitment, if secured, would only last two months. She explained that the WFP request was for USD 20 million for a two-year program.

More Information on U.S. Resettlement Wanted

¶5. (C) Bhattarai noted the high-level of interest within the GON bureaucracy in resolving the 16-year-old issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. However, he said, many officials, from the Home Ministry to Members of Parliament, had asked him about the conditions of resettlement to the U.S. and other host countries. Many of these officials worried that the U.S. would cherry pick refugees by only taking the young and well-educated. To be able to respond to these queries, Bhattarai specifically requested RefCoord to provide him with information on U.S. resettlement, e.g. how would they be transported, where would they be settled, and what would be their legal status in the U.S. He opined that once the GON was well-informed about the U.S. refugee

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resettlement, it would be more willing to agree to, and move forward with, the program. Bhattarai welcomed RefCoord's assurance that an information sheet on U.S. resettlement would be forthcoming and would be shared publicly.

Necessary to Hold Bhutan Accountable

¶6. (C) Bhattarai believed the next Bhutan-Nepal ministerial would be postponed until after formation of the interim government, but did not think that Maoist participation in the government would delay the bilateral meeting. Bhattarai passionately described the need to hold the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) in some way accountable for the expulsion of nearly 1/6 of its population, even if it was merely a commitment from Bhutan that this would not happen again. He agreed with RefCoord that the future of the refugees should not be held hostage to the issue of Bhutanese accountability, but suggested both tracks could be pursued simultaneously.

GON Must Tread Quietly on Tibetan Issues

¶7. (C) When asked about progress on permission for the 180 Tibetan asylee following-to-join cases to depart Nepal, Bhattarai commented that the GON wanted to move forward, but had to proceed very quietly in order to avoid condemnation from the People's Republic of China (PRC). RefCoord expressed frustration that many of these individuals were minor-aged children who had been waiting for over two years to rejoin their families in the U.S. and offered Embassy cooperation to facilitate their departure. Bhattarai responded that the U.S. had to keep reminding the GON to resolve this problem. He also requested RefCoord to provide a letter outlining the particular situation of these 180 Tibetans, specifically indicating what would be their legal status and how they would be resettled. RefCoord explained to him verbally and agreed to follow-up with a letter. (Note: Post has already outlined the status of these 180 Tibetan

asylee following-to-join cases to officials at both the Home and Foreign Ministries, but will do so again. End Note.)

Comment and Action Request

¶8. (SBU) Joint Secretary Dinesh Bhattarai, a useful interlocutor on a wide-range of issues over the past three years, was recently nominated to be Nepal's next Ambassador to UN Mission Geneva. Whether in Kathmandu or in Geneva, he will be a helpful ally in convincing the GON to move forward with resettlement of the Bhutanese refugees. At a time when resolution of the 16-year old Bhutanese refugee situation may be close at hand, it is critical that the U.S. show its support for the refugees. According to WFP, USG funding in 2006 equalled USD 1.94 million. Post requests Department to consider partial funding for the WFP request of USD 20 million in support of the Bhutanese refugee food program for 2007-2008.

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